



Developing a Climate/ Culture Committee

Why go this route?

- Clete Bulach and Bobby Malone report research findings that reveal that students attending schools characterized with positive culture had significantly greater achievement than students attending schools with negative climate.
Bulach and Malone, "The Relationship of School Climate to the Implementation of School Reform", *ERS Spectrum*, 12 (4) 3-8, (1994).
- A study of 91 elementary schools in Michigan by William Brookover showed that "school variables" (day-to-day culture and climate) had more influence on children's achievement than did race and economic variables.
Brookover et al. *School Social Systems and Student Achievement: Schools Can Make a Difference*, New York: Praeger Publishers, (1979).
- "Without a climate that creates a harmonious and well-functioning school, a high degree of academic achievement is difficult, if not downright impossible to obtain."
Hoyle, J., English, F. and Steffy, B. *Skills for Successful Readers* (2nd ed). Arlington, Va: American Assoc of School Administrators, (1994).

You'll know you've arrived when...

- There is a climate committee with specific goals centered around improving school climate.
- The climate committee meets regularly to accomplish the goals.
- The climate committee uses data from surveys and other tools to make decisions.
- The committee, with the input of staff, selects and acts upon strategies to address shared areas of concern.
- The committee has data that shows there has been progress over time in the areas designated for improvement.

Construction Zone



It's about **TIME**

- Set up a climate committee (1 hr).
- Decide upon, coordinate and administer surveys (2-4 hrs).
- Collect & analyze data (1-2 hrs).
- Report the results, invite suggestions (1-2 hrs).
- Set up a plan (2-4 hrs).
- Implement the plan.
- Monitor the plan. (1 hr periodically).




Potential **COSTS**

- Copying surveys for the staff
- Optional professional development (\$500-\$1500/day)
- Optional activities and supplies for the principal, committee or the staff
- Books and articles

The Process

*A step-by-step
guide to developing a
climate/culture committee.*

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 Read the definitions of culture and climate in INSERT for Step 1.

2 Develop a charter that clarifies the team's work.

Use the planning worksheet we've included as **INSERT for Step 2** to clarify purpose, term and responsibilities into a "committee charter" you can use as you recruit people.

3 Recruit carefully selected teachers, administrators, and parents to be on the committee.

A small, active committee that will listen carefully to voices not in the room is best. There should be a committed interest on the part of those selected or who volunteer to be on the committee. Consider having one skeptic for a different perspective.

4 Orient the committee members.

Adapt **INSERT for Step 4** to reflect special conditions in your situation.

5 Consider visiting other schools which have been successful in transforming their cultures.

6 Decide how you will collect data about your current culture.

Some schools choose to gather informal, observational data through techniques such as those listed on **INSERT A** for Step 6. Others prefer the objectivity of surveys. Sample surveys are included for students (**INSERTS B and C**), and teachers (**E**). You could administer surveys to staff (at a staff meeting), and students (during Language Arts classes). Or see packet 3:2 "Auditing Your School's Culture" for a full-scale cultural audit process that involves interview and walk-throughs by an outsider with fresh eyes.

7 Collect and analyze your data.

Summarize the findings that stand out as you listen to various subgroups in the school community. Use our suggested worksheet (**INSERT for Step 7**) to note the top 5 "findings" your committee hears from each group.

8 Present the results to the staff with an emphasis on both strengths and weaknesses.

Use **INSERT A** for Step 8 to offer possible focus areas to staff. Ask them to choose two or three areas to focus on for improvement. Don't (yet) go for strategies, but concentrate on what staff would like to see changed. Have each person fill in the "cards" on **INSERT B** for Step 8, tear them apart and post them where they can be clustered to see where the weight of interest lies.

9 As a committee, **read the article** "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" included with this packet. See **Insert A** for Step 9.

Discuss possible strategies to strengthen your school culture that fit your focus areas. Add ideas from your committee's own thinking. If student belonging is an issue, **INSERT B** for Step 9 offers school-wide strategies for making students feel included.

10 Develop an action plan for each focus area, based on data, staff ideas, and stories from other schools. See **INSERT** for Step 10.

11 Agree on a process for monitoring whether the plan is carried out...and for re-administering the surveys periodically to see if staff, parents or students report noticing any difference.

Insert for Step 11 is a sample form for monitoring.

Getting more mileage from developing a climate committee

How working on your climate benefits your school in regard to the following initiatives:

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

- NCLB requires deliberate strategies and continuous improvement toward helping more and more of our children succeed. For educators like those quoted on the front page of this packet, setting a positive tone for the school may be precisely the “strategy” needed to boost student achievement. If your staff believes that to be the case for your school, then working systematically to make a difference in that tone is a legitimate NCLB strategy. Write it into your school improvement plan and take accountability for doing it as seriously as other “hard-edged” strategies.

Education YES!

- One “Indicator of Engagement” is continuous improvement. Staff who is setting goals and systematically working to influence culture/climate survey data would be a great indicator of staff engagement. Cite research like the sources we suggest to tie this work to student achievement, and use this work as evidence of staff engagement.

MI-Plan

- Step 1 (Pages 11-18) lays out Vision and Mission Statement Development and Analysis. A Climate /Culture committee might contribute its observations and conclusions to such a development process.
- On the other hand, the vision developed by the School Improvement Team might be the place where stakeholders agree that a Climate/Culture committee like this would be the change they most want to see.



Resources

Articles

“Creating Community”

Black Susan, *The American School Board Journal* (June, 1997)

This article emphasizes the importance of culture in student achievement and discusses factors in a building which influence climate and culture.

“Measuring School Climate: Let Me Count the Ways”

Frielberg, Jerome H. *Educational Leadership* (Sept, 1998)

In this article, Frielberg suggests instruments that schools can use to assess culture and then make improvements based on the data collected.

“Lifting a School’s Spirit.”

Wade, Ruth. *Educational Leadership* (May 1997)

Read this article to discover very creative ideas for lifting your school’s spirit.

“An Audit of the Culture Starts with Two Hand Tools”

Wagner, Christopher and Mosden-Copas, Penelope. *Journal of Staff Development*. (Summer 2002)

Reading this article will assist the committee with developing and implementing a whole-school audit.

People

Specialists

Most Intermediate School Districts have a specialist working with schools on school culture in their service areas.

Coaches

The *Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools* website lists coaches whose training has been provided by Michigan State University and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. Some are active in school improvement implementation in Michigan schools. Please visit:

www.abcscoaches.org

Primary Author for this MI-Map Packet

Linda Smith
Partner Educator
Office of School Improvement

MI-Map Coordinator/Editor

Joann Neuroth
Changing Horses
neurothj@aol.com

For more information, contact

Office of School Improvement
Michigan Department of Education
517/241-4285

Websites

The Center for Improving School Culture

www.schoolculture.net

The National School Improvement Project

www.garyphillips.com

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